



Montgomery County Council

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**Remarks by Council President Steve Silverman
at the Inauguration of the 15th County Council
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Thank you. Council colleagues, Mr. Duncan, ladies and gentlemen of Montgomery County, a teacher once asked a student to sum up Socrates' life in four lines.

The student said, "Socrates lived long ago. He was very intelligent. He gave long speeches. His friends poisoned him." So allow me to briefly talk with you this morning about the challenges we face in the next four years.

I'm proud to be here today, as part of the very large team that will lead this county government for the next four years.

As Abraham Lincoln once said, "Government can be a powerful force for action...to do for a community of people whatever they need to have done, but cannot do at all in their separate and individual capacities."

Most people don't stay up at night, thinking about county government (like I do). Most people don't talk much about county government either. When they do it's usually because of concerns about taxes and traffic lights, garbage collection and snow removal.

But we all know that county government is so much more than that. County government is public safety, public schools, public transportation, public health and well-being, public parks, public assistance, and on and on and on.

When I think about Montgomery County government, I think about people... and the difference that government – working with community and neighborhood groups – has been able to make in their lives.

- I think about Charles, 44 years old and a healthy adult until he began to experience abdominal pain. Like nearly 100,000 residents of Montgomery County, he had no health insurance. At MobileMed's clinic, Charles received a

sonogram and a CAT scan. Diagnosed with colon cancer, he got the life-saving surgery he needed and has a good prognosis.

- I think about Hugo and Ruth Miranda. Hugo was an engineer in Bolivia before he immigrated to Montgomery County. He worked as a day laborer for a contractor renovating homes in Connecticut Avenue Estates for Montgomery Housing Partnership. Through his work, Hugo learned about the partnership, scraped up some money, and with our help was able to buy one of the homes he helped to renovate.
- I think about Terry Brennan of Gaithersburg. Terry's employer, Social & Scientific Systems of downtown Silver Spring, participates in our County Fare Share program, which gives incentives for commuters to get to work other than driving alone. Terry uses the MARC and told me that riding the train was a lot better than gripping the wheel.
- I think about Centro Familia where, thanks to County assistance, Latina child-care providers like Senora Diaz participate in the En Familia program. This worthy project helped her upgrade her skills, improve her English, and earn a Maryland family child-care license. She now takes care of her own three children, plus two low-income children who receive child-care subsidies. That's a good investment in their potential that benefits enormously the children – our children – in their care.

We accomplished all this and more through the actions of Montgomery County government. And I haven't even mentioned Silver Spring revitalization, our six-year \$33 million Legacy Open Space program to preserve green space, or our Soccerplex and Strathmore Performing Arts Center projects.

We have come a long, long way in the past four years. But where do we want to be four years from now on issues critical to our families' futures?

I have a few thoughts.

We all want to spend less time on the road and more time with our families. That's as true for the high-tech executive as it is for the plumber on a service call. And as true for the soccer mom as for the senior trying to get to a doctor's appointment. Will Rogers once said that, "The only way to solve the traffic problem is to pass a law that only cars that are fully paid off are allowed to use the highways." Obviously, that's not the answer.

But, my friends, it's also not all about the ICC, important as that is. Even if we hit the ground running on that right after the close of my speech, it would take over a decade to be operational. We can't wait that long for relief.

That's why we need to build the roads we can build now, like the Montrose Parkway. We need to put more buses on the road more often. We need to start the Purple Line by building the link between Bethesda and Silver Spring. We need a Corridor City Transitway running alongside I-270. And we need to expand incentives for commuters to not drive alone.

We all want top-quality public schools for ALL our children. LBJ once said, “We must open the doors of opportunity, but we must equip our people to walk through those doors.” In education, we’ve taken that sentiment and put our money where our mouth is. As a volunteer in my son’s school, I can tell you that it took all of ten minutes for me to see the difference in a five-year-old who’s “ready to learn” and one who isn’t. We knew that all-day kindergarten and small classes would boost that readiness. So we took action.

Four years ago, nine elementary schools had full-day kindergarten. Today, 56 schools have it. Four years ago, no elementary schools had reduced class sizes in kindergarten, first and second grades. Today, 56 elementary schools have smaller k thru 2 class sizes.

But, we can’t stop there. If we want our public schools to truly level the playing field for all our children, we must work harder for the children coming into the system from broken homes, from poverty, and from families where English is not spoken at home.

Indeed, I believe the minority achievement gap is the defining Civil Rights issue for the 21st century. It’s a moral issue and a practical issue. Our County, our state, and our nation are poorer when kids get left behind and cannot realize their dreams, fulfill their potential, and contribute to their community.

No matter the troubled fiscal picture ahead of us, we have to keep on investing in our children. Even as we struggle to build and expand more schools to keep pace with our growing enrollment, we must keep in mind that what goes on inside those walls is more important than the bricks and mortar on the outside.

We all want our county to be a place where hard-working people can put down roots. In years past, Montgomery County has been a model for our programs geared to preserving and promoting affordable housing. But unless we ratchet up our commitment, the red-hot housing market will essentially redline our neighborhoods so that nurses and police officers, fire fighters and teachers, retail workers and day care employees won’t be able to afford to live in the community where they work.

That’s why we need to take a look at land the County already owns and match parcels with non-profit and for-profit developers of affordable housing. We need to provide more incentives for the private sector to do more.

And we need to change the rules of the game to help projects move through the pipeline more quickly, while preserving everyone’s ability to have their say. Why should we treat affordable senior housing the same way we treat gas stations? Why should child-care centers have to jump through the same hoops as shopping centers?

We all want to provide a wonderful place for our senior citizens to live. Soon our County will be – at one and the same time – younger and older.

John Kennedy, in commenting on the increase in the life span, said, “It is not enough for a great nation merely to have added new years to life...our objective must also be to add new life to those years.” Our seniors are an invaluable resource to this County. My own father-in-law is retired and volunteers as an assistant to a middle school science teacher – when he’s not performing in a show at Leisure World.

We have to help our seniors keep on giving of themselves to this community to which they've already given so much. That means more affordable senior housing. It means improved transportation and recreation programs.

None of this will come easy, especially in the difficult fiscal times ahead.

Yogi Berra once said, "If you want to get somewhere, you've got to know where you're going." Well, here's where I believe we can and must go.

Four years from now, we can be a community...

...where all our children get all they need to reach for the stars,

...where we nurture an economy built on high tech and biotech companies – while reaching out a helping hand to our small businesses and to our working poor,

...where we can say that we've cast aside the extremes to chart a transportation policy that makes a difference for County families -- with more roads and transit and with carefully targeted growth – all while preserving green spaces for our kids and their kids, and

...where young couples, seniors, those with limited income, and those with special needs will be able to find an affordable place to live.

It's going to take a lot of hard work and hard choices to get there. But there's a little motto that I keep above my desk. "The person who says it can't be done shouldn't interrupt the person doing it."

On behalf of the new Council, I pledge to you that we will roll up our sleeves, work hard, keep faith with the needs and the values of the people of this great County, and get the job done.

Thank you.